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Maxwell served as the Labour MP for Buckingham from 1964 to 1970

Mirror Group pensioners protest against the raid on their fund; (above) Ian and Kevin Maxwell arrive at court during their fraud trial

Ghislaine Maxwell with Jeffrey Epstein and (above centre) her father

£400m, in the wake of the pensions scandal. His then wife, Pandora, mother to their seven children, claimed a colourful cameo on the day of Kevin's arrest. On hearing an early-morning knock at the door and presuming it to be journalists, she flung open a bedroom window and yelled: "Piss off or I'll call the police." "We are the police," came the reply.

"The trial of Robert Maxwell – or the trials of Robert Maxwell, had he come back and faced the music – would have been a piece of amazing theatre. Way up there with Bernie Madoff," says Greenslade, the author of Maxwell: The Rise and Fall of Robert Maxwell and His Empire.

Ian and Kevin, like all the Maxwell children, were regularly bullied by a father who thought nothing of humiliating them in public (although Ghislaine, apparently, didn't get it quite as bad). "I felt this was a proxy trial for Maxwell," says Greenslade, who attended every day of the brothers' eight-month trial and was pleased when they were acquitted.

For Oxford-educated Ghislaine, the youngest of his nine children, Maxwell's money had provided status and a ticket to the elite. She was dispatched to New York initially as a meeter-and-greeter, to pave her father's way when he bought the Daily News. After his death, she made it her home. She soon became part of Epstein's inner circle and remained there for more than a decade. The two were reportedly briefly an item; they remained close.

She is said to have facilitated Epstein's social contacts, flying with him on his private jet and organising dinners for influential people at his homes. One acquaintance described her as "half ex-girlfriend, half employee, half best friend and fixer". Epstein described her, in a 2003 Vanity Fair profile, as his "best friend".

After he pleaded guilty in 2008 to soliciting prostitution and served 13 months, it appears she moved on, although she remained on New York's social circuit. She founded the non-profit TerraMar Project for the conservation of oceans in 2012, but it shut down abruptly last month. It is not clear how she supports herself.

She has never been accused of wrongdoing by the authorities. Allegations by Epstein's accusers that she helped procure girls for him have been denied repeatedly.

"Maxwell's money provided Ghislaine, the youngest child, status and a ticket to the elite"

Maxwell, one of seven children of Jewish parents, was born Ján Ludvík Hoch in the Czech mountain village of Slatinské Doly, now part of Ukraine and known as Solotvyno. He claimed not to have had a pair of shoes until he was seven.

He escaped Nazi occupation by fleeing to France as a teenager, but lost his parents, four siblings and most of his extended family in the Holocaust. After joining the Czech army in exile, he was evacuated to Britain and joined the British army under the name Ivan du Maurier, apparently after a cigarette brand. He fought in Normandy, met his wife – a student at the Sorbonne – and won the Military Cross for heroism on the Dutch-German border, which was pinned to his chest by Field Marshal Montgomery.

Throughout his life, he was a good friend to Israel, investing heavily in publishing, pharmaceutical and computer firms in the country. He met accusations he was an Israeli spy with furious denials and legal threats. Such speculation was fanned again after his death, when he was accorded almost a state funeral in Israel, attended by the prime minister, Yitzhak Shamir, and the president, Chaim Herzog, and buried in Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives. Conspiracy theorists have claimed that Mossad killed him because Israel refused him a loan and he threatened to retaliate.

Lennox was on the private jet that took Betty and her husband's body to Israel. The crew struggled to load the oversized casket into the small plane, eventually having to prop it up at a 45-degree angle, in clear view of the passengers, he recalls. At one point, looking back, Betty remarked: "Ken, what do you think? Is Robert standing on his head or his feet back there?" "And I said: 'Well, Betty, he's always landed on his feet.' And she just roared with laughter."

Maxwell certainly survived many scrapes. In 1971, a Department of Trade and Industry inquiry investigating a takeover bid at his publishing company Pergamon Press concluded that Maxwell was "not in our opinion a person who can be relied on to exercise proper stewardship of a publicly quoted company". It would have been a damaging setback for many, but not for the man that Private Eye nicknamed "the bouncing Czech".

After the war, having changed his name once more, Ian Robert Maxwell set about recreating the family he had lost. Of his and Betty's nine children, their first-born, Michael, died aged 23, after several years in a coma following a car crash, and a daughter, Karine, died of leukaemia aged three. With the exception of Ghislaine, the surviving children lead lives away from the cameras. Ian, 62, and Kevin, 60, have reportedly set up an organisation similar to the Prince's Trust in Greece.

Growing up, their home was the Oxford mansion Headington Hill Hall, leased from Oxford city council, which Maxwell described as "the best council house in the country". But Sunday family lunches were rarely happy affairs. He was said to ritually humiliate his children by turn, week in, week out.

Pandora, who reportedly refers to her former father-in-law as the "fat fraudster", has spoken of the corporal punishment meted out to Kevin as a child. Greenslade witnessed Maxwell's public admonishments of Ian. In her autobiography, Betty, who died aged 92 in 2013, described Maxwell as bullying, unfaithful and frequently absent. But she insisted he was "not the degenerate monster" many said he was.

To understand Maxwell, says Julia Langdon, the political editor of the Mirror under him for five years, "you have to think of him as a multipersonality. He was the City magnate, the bully, the aspirant politician, the Jewish daddy." Langdon travelled the world with him and found him fascinating. "He was very bombastic, very prone to flattery, very vain. My first reaction when he died was that I could not think of anyone less likely to commit suicide. I think he fell."

Greenslade also dismisses the murder theory. Having interviewed the captain and crew of the Lady Ghislaine in depth, he has concluded that no one could have got aboard on that fateful night.

He does not have fond memories of his time with Maxwell, from 1989 to early 1991. Their first meeting, before he was hired, was at a dinner at a London casino. "He behaved atrociously, sweeping all the cutlery and crockery from the table, saying it was badly laid out." He would sack people while Greenslade was away, play mind games, bully his staff. He used to urinate off the top of the Mirror building and was known to leave the door open when using his office toilet.

Staff often witnessed him trying to impress important visitors by picking up the phone and growling: "Get me the White House. Get me No 10." The switchboard would ring back three minutes later and he would turn his back, pretending he was involved in a conversation. Once, Greenslade recalls, at a charity performance, Maxwell went on stage to lecture a prima ballerina on how to do a movement. "That was the nature of the beast. What you have here is a kind of sociopathic, possibly borderline psychopathic, character."

He adds: "Here was a man, totally found out, not able to escape and not able to bluster. And he would have been in the dock. But he might have taken some very interesting people down with him. In that respect, it's shades of Epstein."

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The deaths that define Ghislaine

Robert Maxwell aboard Lady Ghislaine. The yacht (below) cost £15m

The shocking suicide of Jeffrey Epstein has thrust Robert Maxwell's daughter into the news, 30 years after her father's demise left her family's reputation in tatters, writes **Caroline Davies**

At one time, everyone knew where to find Ghislaine Maxwell. The former aide-de-camp of the disgraced, now deceased, billionaire Jeffrey Epstein was a fixture in Manhattan's most fashionable salons. With an impressive list of contacts, including Prince Andrew and Chelsea Clinton, she was a regular at fundraisers, book launches and society weddings.

The last place anyone would have expected to see her was a Los Angeles shopping mall, where the 57-year-old was photographed in a burger joint last week, just days after Epstein's suicide in a New York jail, where he was being held on charges of sex trafficking underage girls.

Amid some speculation as to whether the photograph may have been staged, and with mystery still surrounding her whereabouts, one thing is undeniable: for the second time, Ghislaine's life has been turned upside down by the death of a controversial and powerful man.

It is almost 30 years since her father, the press baron Robert Maxwell, fell to his death from his £15m yacht, Lady Ghislaine, off the Canary Islands, aged 68. Even now there is talk of suicide, or murder - perhaps by Mossad, the Israeli intelligence service. "He was a man who could not face the ignominy of jail, of being shown to be a liar and a thief. And he very much knew that was coming," says Roy Greenslade, a former editor of one of Maxwell's newspapers, the Daily Mirror. "So I am a suicide theorist. I believe Maxwell threw himself off."

But Ken Lennox, then the Mirror's senior photographer, who saw the publisher's naked corpse shortly after it was pulled from the sea, is convinced: it was an accident. "He used to get up at night and pee over the stern of the ship. Everybody knew this. And he weighed about 22 stone [140kg] at this time. The railings were wire. So I think he lost his balance, because he was very top-heavy," Lennox says. "He was Teflon man. I don't think he committed suicide."

Bombastic, bullying and with a deep, booming voice, Maxwell was an enormous figure in British national life. Apart from Mirror Group Newspapers and the New York Daily News, his many businesses included Oxford United and Derby County football clubs. He rose from impoverishment as a Czech refugee to become a decorated war hero, a businessman, a Labour MP and then a media mogul, amassing private jets, helicopters and Rolls-Royces en route.

His death on 5 November 1991 shocked the country. Shock turned to anger within weeks when a £460m hole was discovered in the pension funds of his companies. He had illegally raided the funds to prop up his empire, which was on the brink of collapse. Headlines such as The Man Who Saved the Mirror were swiftly replaced by Maxwell: The Robber.

Lennox found himself at the heart of this drama when he was dispatched to help Maxwell's widow, Betty, as she flew by private jet to the Canary Islands. On take-off, her husband was still missing. Mid-flight, Lennox recalls, he was summoned to the cockpit. A body had been found in the Atlantic by a fisherman. The Spanish were unsure it was Maxwell. Would Lennox agree to look first to spare his widow unnecessary distress in case it was not her husband?

They landed at an airbase and Lennox was ushered into a room. "And there was Maxwell. Completely naked, lying on top of the air-sea rescue officers' mess table with a sheet underneath him. And, I know it sounds crazy, but he looked good. His hair still slicked back, his complexion; he looked as if he was still alive." Apart from a graze to his left shoulder, Maxwell's body was unmarked, Lennox says.

He signed an affidavit that it was, indeed, the publisher. "Then they asked me to come over and stand by Maxwell. I held up the affidavit and they took a photograph of me, with Robert underneath. So, somewhere in the Spanish archives, there is a photograph of me with his corpse."

The rumours started immediately. An inquest that later recorded death by heart attack and accidental drowning has failed to quell them.

"People were phoning me up with all the conspiracy theories. 'Do you think he was knocked off? Did you see any puncture marks behind his ears?' But he was unmarked, apart from that graze on his shoulder," says Lennox.

Betty would later formally identify her husband. Shortly afterwards, Ghislaine flew in. "You could tell, this was 'Daddy's girl'. She was inconsolable; she could hardly speak. When she saw her mother, her knees just buckled," Lennox recalls. "She was really devastated. If you look through the Maxwell files, he would take her to events: Elton John's birthday, football matches. She was always there, clinging on to him. She called him "My Daddy" all the time."

The fallout from Maxwell's death left his family's reputation in tatters. It also landed two of his sons, Ian and Kevin, in the dock, where they successfully defended themselves in 1996 against fraud charges arising from their roles in his companies.

Kevin became Britain's biggest bankrupt, to the tune of more than

The Maxwell children were regularly bullied by a father who humiliated them in public

Maxwell (above left) launches the London Daily News; (below) the Daily Mirror, which he owned, announces his death

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